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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 001251

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SUBJECT: DASD CAGAN RECEIVES QUALIFIED AGREEMENT TO  
"ENHANCEMENT" OF ARMENIA'S TROOP CONTINGENT IN IRAQ

Classified By: CDA R.V. Perina, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: DASD Cagan's Yerevan visit October 11 got positive signals from the Armenian government on doubling its Iraq contingent to 100 and taking on a new fixed-site security mission. Sargsian requested, however, that CDA Perina present the request directly to President Kocharian, who was out of town during the Cagan visit. CDA will follow up on Tuesday, October 16. We hope the president will not oppose the proposed increase, given that his term will end in February 2008, and it is PM Sargsian, if anyone, who would suffer electoral vulnerabilities over the issue. However, Kocharian remains a powerful figure, both informally as well as with his robust constitutional authority as commander in chief, and we cannot take his approval for granted. Meanwhile, Sargsian left us with a political request that U.S. officials always refer to the proposed change in Armenia's Iraq contingent as an "enhancement" to its deployment, presumably to aid his domestic public relations effort. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) MOD CONCERNS: Post primed Cagan for meetings with all the key defense decision-makers in Yerevan except the president, who was traveling abroad with his key staffers during the visit. She started with the Defense Minister and CHOD, who raised objections about Armenia's ability to recruit and train enough forces into its still-small 12th Peacekeeping Battalion to increase its Iraq deployment while also sustaining its commitment (to EU partners) to double its Kosovo deployment to roughly 70 soldiers. The minister spoke of the MOD's difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteer/contract enlistees (NOTE: Outside the 12th PKO battalion, Armenia's soldier are almost all conscripts. END NOTE) to sustain a higher Iraq deployment. He noted that the PKO battalion currently has just 280 troops assigned, and that for every soldier deployed downrange in Iraq or Kosovo, two more are back home in Armenia, either training/preparing for the next rotation or just returned from deployment themselves.

¶3. (C) MOD PITCH SCORES POINTS: Cagan clarified that what she really looked for from Armenia right now was just one reinforced platoon of roughly 50 troops, who would be able to take on a fixed-site security mission. She pointed out that this would be relatively safer than Armenia's existing mission in Iraq (truck drivers, deminers/UXO disposal, and medical specialists) since it would be "inside the wire" at fixed bases. Cagan explained that there was a special fund (which would not tap Armenia's FMF or IMET) to pay for a very rapid train and equip program to prepare Armenia's troops for Iraq service in time to deploy in early 2008. Such training could yield Armenian troops the equivalent of years' worth of FMF/IMET-funded training, significantly advancing the timetable on Armenia's efforts to stand up a full PKO

brigade. Cagan repeatedly emphasized (in all meetings) that the United States would never ask coalition partners to deploy to a combat theater without adequate training and equipment. This was not merely fraternal concern, she said, but hard-headed pragmatism, as U.S. troops needed to know they could rely on coalition partner soldiers who stand with them. She underlined the critical importance of succeeding in Iraq, how this would be beneficial to regional stability, and said that the United States and the Iraqis needed Armenia's help. This visibly won over the CHOD, and seemed to persuade the more-skeptical MinDef as well.

14. (C) REQUIRES A POLITICAL DECISION: Defense Minister Harutyunian explained that a decision to increase the Iraq deployment would be fundamentally a political decision made above his pay grade. He told us that he would go from our meeting directly to a weekly cabinet meeting, on the margins of which he would convey our request and arguments to the prime minister.

15. (C) DEFENSE COMMITTEE CHAIR WILLING: After a brief visit to the 12th PKO battalion, Cagan next called on Artur Agabekian, the chairman of the National Assembly's defense committee, reviewing the same points she had made with MinDef and CHOD. (NOTE: Agabekian was long-time deputy defense minister under then-defense minister (and now prime minister) Serzh Sargsian. He was for many years the leading engine of NATO/IPAP reform within the MOD, and is believed to enjoy Sargsian's confidence. END NOTE). Agabekian warmly praised U.S. support for Armenia's defense reform, and noted his own perception that the United States ensured coalition partner troops in Iraq were treated as well as American troops in regards to living standards, food, equipment, training, and other necessities. Agabekian was a supporter of a judicious

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increase to Armenia's contribution.

16. (C) ...BUT HAS POINTS TO RAISE: Agabekian outlined several objections that Cagan might hear from other quarters and needs to counter. The first was the resentment that Georgia's troops in Iraq had their salaries paid by the United States, while Armenia's were not. Cagan replied that Georgia's troops working for the UN Mission in Iraq had their salaries paid by the UN, but that those Georgian troops deployed in combat missions as part of the coalition did not receive salary compensation from the U.S. There would likely be other UN missions under the recently expanded mandate and if Armenia wished to participate in an upcoming mission there might be UN-paid salaries. Agabekian was glad to have the discrepancy explained so that he could answer critics. His second objection was that he had been unable to learn what kind of plan was in place to evacuate Armenian troops in extremis from a hot combat situation, and he feared there was no real plan. Cagan assured him that MNF-I, MNC-I, and MND-CS (where Armenia's troops currently serve) has robust plans to evacuate troops from the face of an overwhelming threat if one emerged, and it would be easy to ensure that the Armenian chain of command was adequately briefed on those plans. His third reservation (though ambivalent, and contradicted by other opinions expressed during the visit) was that he would prefer Armenian troops to serve under U.S. command than Polish command, since Armenia was deployed in Iraq as a political gesture to the United States. Cagan replied that General Petraeus was prepared to be very flexible about where to deploy additional Armenian troops, and whatever Armenia's preferences were could almost certainly be accommodated.

17. (C) CHOD AND PARLIAMENT ARE SOLD: CDA Perina hosted Cagan at lunch with the CHOD, Deputy Foreign Minister Kirakossian, and Armen Rustamian, chairman of parliament's Foreign Relations Committee. She delivered her basic pitch on boosting Armenia's contribution, echoing points made in previous meetings, and the group discussed the issue. The CHOD eventually volunteered the information that the MOD had

signaled to the prime minister its readiness and willingness to double the Armenian contingent to Iraq if the political decision to do so were made, and told Cagan he simply awaited those instructions. Rustamian and Kirakossian shared the CHOD's view that the proposal is "doable" so long as Armenia's top political leaders -- the PM and president -- agreed to it. Rustamian noted that the parliamentary debate before Armenia's initial Iraq deployment focused on many potential risks, none of which have come to pass. Thus, parliament is more comfortable with the Iraq mission than before, he judged.

18. (C) PERSUADING THE PM: Cagan delivered the message again to Prime Minister Sargsian, who said that he had already been briefed by Defense Minister Harutyunian. Cagan also mentioned that she had been able to confirm with the SecDef's office that the SecDef would see PM Sargsian during Sargsian's Washington visit October 17-23. Sargsian thanked Cagan for this news. He affirmed that the situation in Iraq is of real importance to Armenia, which is situated in Iraq's neighborhood, meaning that Armenia could be directly affected should chaos ensue there. Sargsian made passing reference to the practical, logistical difficulties that would need to be overcome, expressing some skepticism that even a robust U.S.-supplied train and equip program could get Armenia's soldiers up to speed as quickly as Cagan seemed to wish. Implicitly acknowledging, however, that these issues were solvable with U.S. help, he moved on to his political concerns, specifically revolving around his February 2008 run to be elected president but also pertaining to the need to renew by the end of December Armenia's legislative authority for its Iraq deployment. He said it would be much easier if the issue of an increase could be postponed until after February. Cagan replied that the need is urgent, and we cannot begin preparing Armenian troops until there is a commitment to deploy the additional troops to Iraq. Sargsian strongly agreed on the importance of troops being well-trained and equipped for the mission. Sargsian said he would need to consult with the president and National Assembly before he could reply to Cagan's proposal. Cagan responded that she respected these requirements, and she hoped PM Sargsian would be able to give a definitive answer in Washington.

19. (C) ...WHO LATER SIGNS ON: Within two hours of Cagan's meeting with the Prime Minister, DFM Kirakossian called CDA with the news that the PM had decided that he could support Cagan's request to double Armenia's soldiers in Iraq.

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However, he asked that the United States make its appeal directly to President Kocharian upon the latter's return to Armenia. Further, the prime minister asked that we always term the changed Armenian commitment an "enhancement" in our commentary on the matter. CDA agreed that he would seek an appointment as early as he can with President Kocharian and would deliver Cagan's points to the president, and also that he thought we should have no objection to using the PM's favored term to describe the change. The meeting is now scheduled for Tuesday, October 16.

110. (C) COMMENT: From an internal political analysis point of view, we find it interesting that Sargsian asked us to deliver our pitch to President Kocharian directly, rather than himself working it out with the president. This seems to corroborate the view that the two men -- who for so long were "joined at the hip" in running Armenia -- may have had some parting of the ways in their respective political interests, and Sargsian does not want to be the one to carry this water to the president. It also strongly suggests that the president is no mere lame-duck, waiting out the final months of his term, but is still very much a leading (perhaps still even THE leading) decisionmaker, despite the near-universal presumption that Sargsian is taking over the reins from his long-time boss.

¶11. (U) DASD Cagan has cleared on this cable.  
PERINA